**Office of Award Pre-Proposal Support, Research Foundation CUNY**

**“Pathways to Funding for Arts and Humanities Projects”**

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**Context of the Talk**

Not about the elements of a generic grant; what magic language to use; giving you a list of funders to go after; or highlighting specific programs

Instead, focus is on general strategies to help negotiate the grey areas of A&H grantseeking, relevant to nearly all project-based work and nearly all A&Hgrantmaking scenarios

**I. Matching Funding Pathways to the Work You Want Accomplished**

**First, ask yourself** two separate questions:

* *will I work alone or on a team?*
* *will I work inside or outside an institution*?

Your answers will correspond to three different types of academic labor:

* Book projects/monographs/commissions for new works [**individual labor, solitary context**]
* Theory-of-change investigations [**individual *or* collaborative labor, institutional context**]
  + Identify a real-world problem and ask a value-laden question(s) about it OR
  + Identify a prior occurrence and ask value-laden question(s) about why it turned out that way
    - E.g. How to: reduce Latinx attrition in humanities classrooms through culturally responsive pedagogy? How do: digital technologies change the work of dramaturges and the experience of theater-goers? How can: the 1970s fiscal crisis of NYC explain regional inequality today, through a historical lens?
* Community-based projects [**collaborative labor, institutional context**]
  + Creating systemic change through intervention(s), but not necessarily any intellectual deliverable to share
    - E.g. Fixing the school-to-prison pipeline; arts education after-school programs; professional development for educators of the formerly homeless

Some big picture, broad stroke generalities

* Book projects et al and theory-of-change emphasize knowledge creation
* Theory-of-change and community-based projects emphasize public implications
* Theory-of-change straddles the two and can serve as a bridge to translate relevance of academic work into outcomes that A&H grantmakers desire
* **ALSO, NOTE** that choosing whether to work on a team, or inside/outside an institution, both opens and closes doors for the types of projects you can take on (and the types of funders you can apply to).
* A&H grantmaking space is tilted to serve 501c3 organizations – institutions, partnerships, theory-of-change projects, and community-based projects let you compete on an even playing field
* Faculty at the top of their game seamlessly blend these three different types of academic labor into large-scale projects – in real-world work, they are rarely kept totally separate, nor should they be
* Social scientists are trained to think and work this way – that’s why they’re snatching up so much A&H money!

**Then, ask yourself**, *what ‘species’ of funder links strongest to the proposed labor?*

* Internal (e.g. PSC-CUNY, college-specific awards)
  + Mostly monograph/commission projects
* Academic Professional Groups (e.g. the Modern Language Association or Academy of Arts and Sciences)
  + Mostly monograph/commission *or* theory-of-change projects
* Government/NGO (e.g. NEA, NEH, int’l equivalents like research/arts councils)
  + Mostly theory-of-change *or* community-based projects
* Private Foundation (e.g. Ford Foundation, W.T. Grant Foundation, smaller family foundations)
  + Mostly theory-of-change *or* community-based projects

**Finally,** **ask yourself**, *who is best equipped to shepherd this proposal at my school?*

* The **Grants/Sponsored Programs Office** may be best if
  + The funder requires complex authorization, compliance, budgetary, or strategic information
  + Your college’s relationship to the funder is institution-to-institution, not person-to-person
  + The grant requires personnel management, equipment purchases, and other tangibles tied to a work plan or budget
  + The decision-maker is a panel of external specialists (your peers) in the grant’s subject matter
* The **Development Office** (or your college Foundation) may be best if
  + The funder is a part of your local community, or situated within the five boroughs/tri-state area
  + Your college is already receiving donations from the funder, or some person-to-person relationship exists
  + There are no stated deliverables, final reports, or evaluation components (intended award is more of a “gift”)
  + The decision-maker is a program officer with sole discretionary power, or a small group of non-specialists (e.g. the blood relatives on the board of a family foundation)

**II. Private Foundations 101**

* Private foundation “law of the jungle”: people give money to people who they know and like.
  + Brilliance of your ideas alone won’t work. Your currency is your reputation and network of relationships.
* “If you know one foundation, you know one foundation” – what applies to one doesn’t necessary apply to another.
* When approaching a private foundation, take a step back – **ask yourself** – what is the grant-maker seeking to do?
  + Foundations are thinking about “how do we distinguish ourselves – how do we keep ourselves relevant?”
  + Projects are selected when outcomes will enhance *the foundation’s* prominence in a priority area.
  + No RFPs, unlike federal, state, or city agencies – you need to discover what the flavor of the month is.
  + Funding priorities are weather systems – chats with program officers tell you where the wind is blowing.
  + Finding the right foundation match is like dating:
    - 1) there are some ugly ducklings or misfires along the way
    - 2) then a “courtship” when things look promising
    - 3.) finally, a “proposal” for $$$.
* No. 1 objective is to secure meetings with program officers. Come with a strong idea(s) ready, but…
  + Your job is to make *them* talk; get them to show their cards first. Be ready to react with new ideas to pitch.
  + Establish yourself (in their eyes) as a “thought leader” in a given area, so they think of your name when a need arises.
* Be patient when networking for foundation grants. Keep turning up, keep finding small ways to amplify your name

**III. Partnerships**

* As arts/humanities faculty, you’re trained to work on your own. But competitive grant-seeking requires deliberate collaborations with other institutions/people/expertise areas.
  + Funders expect you to be working in partnerships, more so as the potential grant size increases.
  + They want to fund game-changers: it’s tough to do that alone.
* Partnerships are how you leapfrog over your own institutional deficits, resource lacks, and expertise blind-spots.
* Ask yourself: how can I involve people who participate in the same research question or project vision from different vantages?
  + Scholars, artists, organizers, administrators, policymakers – the list goes on.
* Remember, as higher education faculty, you offer external collaborators a lot of value as well.
  + Campus space, institutional resources and know-how, but most importantly, the chance to work with your students.
  + Keep a dialogue open with people from past projects – figure out through-lines from earlier successes, and pull that thread into the present.
* Most likely, there is a non-academic, external “field” encompassing your discipline or research questions: grassroots activists, NPOs, NGOs, government agencies, and even for-profit companies. Seek out and become a part of conversations with these practitioners.
* Cultivating partners is crucial to meeting new funders. External actors that show affinity for your research will invite you to show up to their events when their funders will be in the room.

**IV. Leveraging Your Institution**

* Align with CUNY institutes/divisions that already have funder relationships. Become an appendage of a larger endeavor where your vision adds value.
  + CUNY presidents and provosts are often invited to speak with grant-makers – get on your leadership’s radar so they know you, like you, and will select you to participate on institution-wide grants.
* Develop relationships with the top faculty grant-getters on your campus.
  + Ask your Dean or Grants Office for a list of the most prolific grant-getters in your discipline.
  + Seek them out, and if you click, ask them to be your “grant mentors”. Serve as their co-PI, then swap roles to be PI once you gain experience running grant projects.
* “Map the ideology” and norms of your institution, esp. if your project concept is activist or outside the box – where are the pitfalls, and where are the safety zones, among departments, offices, or divisions?
  + Actively seek out senior faculty allies – make those people part of your project team
  + Make a plan in case your institution’s agenda or circumstances shift (e.g. budgetary problems, new leadership)
* Use your institution’s existing infrastructure and built-in resources to pilot your project concept on a small-scale
  + Use internal funding or spit-and-glue strategies to create an initial track record to take to external funders.

**V. Integrating Your Academic Career and Grant Projects**

* 9 times out of 10, funders won’t support the same research agenda you’ve been pursuing for 10 years.
  + No $$$ for papers, books, or conference abstracts. Sorry.
* Expand your horizons of what research can be – e.g. curricula, pedagogy, convenings, artworks, and social practice projects.
* Design research projects whose outcomes will serve the needs of both the academy and practitioners.
* Pursue new directions that have visible, transformative applications and contexts.
  + Translate your long-term research project(s) to ask value-laden questions that have public consequences.
  + Tease out its intrinsic utility beyond scholarship – public policy, higher education policy, community design, and cultural expression.
  + Chances are, your ongoing projects already contain those threads – you just need to pull on them a bit more.
  + Think less “history” and more “historiography”.
* Conceive of your classroom space as a vital asset for grant applications and programmatic work.
  + How can your project be continuous from the classroom out into the community? What external agents can facilitate this?
* Major funders flock to academic conferences to figure out which people are worth investing in. Meet them!
  + For every conference you attend, access the advance attendance list. Reach out to program officers and secure short meetings. In the same way, seek relationships with well-funded peers. This isn’t just a grad school cohort reunion.

**VI. Case Study One**

* You are an assistant professor whose scholarship focuses on arts learning outcomes for children in disinvested neighborhoods.
* You discover that a regional family foundation frequently gives grants to an arts education non-profit nearby your college.
* You gradually build a relationship with the staff and Board of the non-profit by showing up to their special events and volunteering twice a month at their program facility.
* The nonprofit is invited to submit a grant proposal to the foundation at a substantially higher amount, but the foundation mandates a strong evaluation component
* Knowing your expertise, the nonprofit requests that you serve as a paid evaluator for the grant project, but also invites you to assist in the program design – you construct a logic model that speaks directly to your personal scholarship, and provides evidence for future academic publications that support a tenure bid.
* The foundation program officer is impressed by your savvy deliverable at the project end and invites you to present at a funder roundtable of other foundations prioritizing arts education. After sharing your work, another attending foundation that already makes gifts to your college suggests making grants to you directly.
* You work with your grants office to develop a compliant and competitive proposal, but also liaise with your development office to successfully manage your new relationship with the foundation staff

**VIII. Case Study Two**

* You are an assistant professor who specializes in cultural memory studies of African migrant communities in America. You want to pursue a digital humanities project that first requires building a collection of ephemera, artifacts, and primary sources.
* None of your internal award applications or American Historical Association grants have worked out so far.
* But you discover that the Graduate Center has an Institute for Research on the African Diaspora and the Caribbean (IRADAC)! You meet with the senior faculty in charge and discover a lot of synergy between your research agendas.
* You always thought that the NEH’s “Common Heritage” program was perfect for your work, but as an individual, you were ineligible to apply.
* You convince IRADAC to submit a grant to “Common Heritage”: they will build and host a scholarly hub for digitized materials online.
* You also seek out and receive a letter of commitment from the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) in Brooklyn to collaborate on related public programs.
* You collaborate with MoCADA’s staff grantwriter, and your campus grants office, to submit an amazingly competitive proposal!

**VI. Other Tips (not on the slides)**

* If you can raise grant $$$ for your campus or department, then you can buy out teaching loads, receive summer salary, and secure other incentives that make grant-seeking more viable amidst competing career priorities.
* Explore who around the world is pursuing aligned projects – you are not limited to domestic funding, particularly if you partner with the funder nation’s native scholars and artists.
* If you work on international topics, approach the embassy/consulate/diplomatic mission of associated nations (in America). They often spend significantly on endeavors that promote “cultural diplomacy”.
* Sign up for funder newsletters, read their annual reports, and glance at their special evaluations – figure out their “pulse” in advance of seeking a program officer meeting.
* Funders are often driven by a fear of irrelevance, particularly private foundations. Exploit this insecurity, and present yourself (your project, your institute, your role at CUNY) as indispensable change agents.
* If your proposal rejected, you can ask why you didn’t get funded as a way of growing the relationship – that’s a space in which you can start a dialogue, but there is little risk of you coming across as annoying.

**IX. Closing Thoughts**

* “Success” most often involves slowly cobbling together funding from patchwork sources.
* Early career grant-seekers will make initial breakthroughs with smaller, individual awards.
  + Keep the momentum going! The purpose of small internal grants is to enhance your competitiveness.
  + Continuously build the connections and network to compete in group and institutional contexts, securing larger and more ambitious grants.
* Grant-writing is a muscle, and few higher education cultures emphasize its growth.
  + Don’t become discouraged after 2-3 attempts and give up.
* Serve on review panels. You’ll see some of the best proposals in your field.
  + You won’t lift their technical ideas, but you will lift the structure and style of presentation.
  + You will also understand the nuances of the review process.
* Check out the RFCUNY YouTube page for video of a November 2018 A&H Grantseeking Town Hall

**Above all else**, grants-person-ship requires:

* + Shameless promotion of your work to anyone willing to listen. No one will know that you’re viable to support unless you’re putting yourself out there.
  + Envisioning your scholarship/projects as an intervention or activism. Make the case that the grant money will push some needle, somewhere, for our intellectual, social, political, or cultural life.